

THE STRANGE CAVALIER.

A TALE OF THE OLDEN TIME.

by H. SYMMES.

"Let me tell your fortune, pretty ladies—very good fortune to you, ma'am," cried a dark-eyed gipsy, as two ladies turned the corner of a beautifully-sequestered lane, while the last rays of a gorgeous sun were merging into the more voluptuous tinge of a summer twilight. "Oh, do let us have our fortune told—I should so like to know my fortune!" exclaimed the younger of the ladies, who leant upon the arm of her companion. "Nonsense, Annette," rejoined her friend, and by this time they had reached the spot where the sibyl was standing. Her appearance fully demonstrated her tribe; her face was of the most swarthy hue, but interesting in the expression; her eyes were jet black; and her dark elf-locks, which hung dishevelled over her neck and shoulders, were partly concealed by a small hat that was tied under the chin by a party-colored handkerchief; while her figure, of no ordinary mould, was encumbered by the tattered fragments of an old red cloak.

The ladies paused for an instant to contemplate the object before them. "I can tell you," said she, addressing the younger lady, "what, mayhap, you will not like to hear. You will love, but you will not be loved again; you will sigh, but no sigh will be returned to you; you will weep, but your tears will fall on your cheek like dew on the summer flower, that dries but to receive fresh moisture."

Without uttering a word, the ladies now turned, and hastily pursued their way homeward. They had wandered, attracted by the beauty of the evening, farther than they had intended. The Baroness D--, for so we must introduce her to our readers, had taken under her protection Annette De M--, who was an orphan, and the sole remaining branch of a noble family. The Baroness D-- had herself been left an orphan at

an early age. She had afterward married the Baron D--, who had been dead about two years at the time our tale commences, leaving her without progeny, her only child having died in its infancy. She had inherited her husband's vast estates, and was at this time residing in her favorite castle, situated in the most beautiful of the midland counties of England.

The ladies silently pursued their way until they reached the extensive avenue that formed the barrier to the noble domain. Trees of regular but enormous height were thickly studded on either side, and the Baroness frequently started at the echo of their footsteps as she pressed forward with her young companion. The moon had risen and now shone in silvery brightness, while not a zephyr fanned the foliage, nor a whisper broke upon the stillness of the night. They had reached about the middle of the avenue, when they were alarmed by the sound of a horse's hoofs. Both started and fearfully looked behind them; the figure of a man on horseback was distinctly visible; retreat or flight was alike impossible, for in another minute a cavalier, in complete armour, and mounted on a panting charger, stood beside them. In the next moment the knight sprung from the saddle-bow, and falling gracefully upon one knee before the Baroness, exclaimed—

"Fairy lady, deign to take pity upon a stranger Knight, who is pursued by his enemies; even now," cried he, with increased trepidation, "is a price set upon my head; my party have been defeated by some of Cromwell's army, and a number of my followers are slain. Deign then, kind lady, to grant me an asylum in your mansion for this night only; and I pledge you, on the faith of a true knight, to requite your hospitality."

"Sir Knight," replied the Baroness, "your request is granted: it is enough for me to know that you are a Royalist, and in danger; follow us then, and I promise you a safe retreat"

The Cavalier arose, and was profuse in his expressions of thankfulness. In silence they now pursued their way, until they

reached the principal entrance of the castle. The Baroness rung at the massive portal, and in a few seconds it was opened by an aged domestic.

"Morden, see that yon steed lacks not proper food; and for you, Sir Knight, I bid you welcome; you need not be apprehensive, I am mistress here, and there is none to thwart me." They were now ushered by several domestics through suites of rooms, until they reached one brilliantly illuminated, and furnished in a style of magnificence suited to the time; the walls were of oak richly carved; and the ceiling, which formed a cupola, was of the same material. Upon a marble pedestal stood an alabaster chandelier, in which were numerous lights, that gave a brilliancy to the whole apartment. The Baroness politely motioned her guest to be seated, and ordered the supper to be presently served. When the domestics had quitted the apartment, she arose, and taking a small silver lamp from a table near her, she requested the Cavalier to follow her. "Sir Knight," continued she, "while the domestics are preparing our repast, I will show you where you may conceal yourself, and where, even should your pursuers demand an entrance, they cannot discover you." Then turning to her young friend, she said, in a tone of assumed gaiety, "Annette, my love, take your lyre, it will wile away the time till our return. Saying this, she quitted the room, followed by the Cavalier. They proceeded through a long suite of rooms, which terminated in a winding gallery; here they paused to unlock a door, which discovered a narrow staircase; having ascended several steps, they found themselves in a spacious apartment hung with arras. It was perfectly square. The Baroness advanced to one side of the room, and lifting the hanging, gently touched an unseen spring; instantly one of the panels disappeared, and displayed a room of more spacious dimensions than the former.

"Here, then, Sir Knight," exclaimed the Baroness, "you may find a safe retreat; I will myself teach you the virtue of the spring, that in case of a surprise, you may, without difficulty, find your way to this apartment."

Having satisfied herself that her guest was acquainted with the method of opening the panel, the Baroness hastened to return to the saloon, being fearful that Annette might be uneasy at her absence. The dulcet notes of the lyre reached them before they arrived at the apartment. Annette expressed her joy at their return; and, at the request of the Cavalier, sung a ballad with exquisite pathos and harmony.

Supper was now spread; the Baroness courteously invited her guest to partake of the rich viands that were set before him. The repast being ended, they entered into an interesting discussion upon the probable results of the fatal wars, that harassed every part of the kingdom. The discourse had lasted about an hour, when the hearts of all present seemed to stand still, as a loud knocking was heard at the portal. "Fly, Sir Knight," cried the Baroness, hastily putting a lamp into his hand; "your pursuers are here—but fear nothing—remember the secret spring!" The Cavalier pressed the hand from which he took the lamp, then hastily quitted the apartment.

The knocking was now renewed with redoubled violence; and the domestics were ordered to give parley. It was, indeed, some of Cromwell's party, who were in quest of their unfortunate victim. They loudly demanded admittance, which the Baroness, anxious to prolong the time for awhile, desired her servants to refuse. Soon, however, they accompanied their knocking with threats, and the porter was desired to suffer them to enter. A party of soldiers now rushed into the hall. They soon found their way to the saloon, where the Baroness and Annette were seated in trembling agitation. The foremost of the party, who seemed the chief in command, now spoke—

"We believe you to be the Baroness D--, and as such, take you to lean adherent of Charles Stuart; we, therefore, command you, in the name of the commonwealth, instantly to deliver up him you have concealed within these walls. This is our General's pleasure."

"You are correct in the conclusions you have formed of me," rejoined

the Baroness; "but he whom you seek is not here; but go," she continued, "you have free access to every part of my mansion."

No sooner had the Baroness ceased speaking than the soldiers quitted the apartment to commence their search.

About an hour elapsed, during which time the two ladies sat in a trembling state of anxiety and apprehension. At length a heavy tread announced the return of the besiegers. Their voices were raised as if in deep altercation; as they approached near the saloon, it sunk into audible murmurs, accompanied by muttered threats and imprecations. The leader of the band re-entered the apartment, and said, "we find that we have been mistaken, lady; but beware that you do not harbor any traitor, for you would sorely repent your rashness."

The man then quitted the room, and commanding the soldiers to follow him, the portal once more closed upon the unwelcome visitants. The Baroness having assured herself that peace was restored, hastened to that part of the Castle where she had secured the unfortunate stranger. As she trod along the spacious apartments, she often paused to listen, and in imagination, thought she could hear the dreadful imprecations that had escaped the soldiers; but all was still, and she reached the door of the captive Knight. Great was the Cavalier's joy at beholding her, and profusely did he pour forth his expressions of thankfulness to his deliverer. They continued to converse upon what had passed for some time after they had reached the saloon. The Baroness posted two of her domestics in the great hall for the night in case of a second alarm; and her guest entreated permission to watch with them, but this his kind hostess would not consent to. They now separated for the night.

The next morning, when they met at the breakfast table, they recapitulated the events of the preceding night, and a general thanksgiving was offered to that Power which had protected them. If the Baroness and her young friend had been charmed with the elegant deportment of the Cavalier on the previous evening, they

were now not less delighted at the graceful polish of his manners, and the refined intelligence that pervaded his conversation. When breakfast was over he proposed to depart; but the Baroness so warmly urged the necessity of his remaining until his pursuers had quitted the precincts of the Castle, and so strongly animadverted upon the probability that some secret emissary might be lying in wait for him, that he consented to remain for a few days.

The time passed uninterruptedly in agreeable and interesting discourse, which was occasionally varied by the sweet tones of the lyre, to which Annette sung in a strain of touching melody, and at the request of the stranger would frequently repeat her lay. It was on the fifth day of the Knight's sojourn at the Castle. The Baroness, Annette, and the Cavalier were all seated in the saloon, watching the shades of evening closing around them.

"Tomorrow, my kind friends, I must depart," exclaimed the Knight; "by dawn of day my steed must be in readiness; and," continued he, addressing the Baroness, at the same time unclasping from his neck a gold chain of exquisite workmanship, "let me present you with this, and remember that you may claim everything at my hands, for my debt to you cannot easily be repaid." Saying this, he imprinted a kiss on the hand that was extended toward him.

On the following morning, at dawn of day, Morden was in the courtyard, holding the bridle-rein of the noble charger. In an instant the Knight had vaulted in his saddle; the old porter presented the stirrup-cup, then gave the parting benediction. The Knight gave one glance at a window, where stood the Baroness and Annette, who had both risen at that early hour in compliment to their guest; thrice he saluted the fair inmates—in another minute the horse and his rider had disappeared.

It was on the twentieth of May, 1661, that the Baroness and her friend were seated by an open window in the spacious library; the castle clock had tolled the hour of noon—then the accustomed dinner-hour

for all persons of quality.

"We must begin our journey tomorrow, dear Annette," exclaimed the Baroness, "for I would behold our beloved Monarch's triumphal entry to the throne of his ancestors; and who knows," continued she, as she gazed anxiously upon her young friend's pallid countenance—"who knows but we may see him who once sought shelter within these walls; such an event would, I know, give my dear friend pleasure." Annette spoke not; but a pale blush overspread her fine features; still she remained silent. The remainder of the day was spent in making preparations for their departure.

On the following morning, the two friends, attended by a train of domestics, set out for the metropolis; and at the expiration of a week, during which nothing particular happened, arrived at the entrance of the vast city. It was on the very day that the populace were assembling to welcome their sovereign. Triumphal arches, decorated with flowers and interspersed with oak-boughs were raised across the road, and at intervals through every street. The windows in all the houses were adorned with garlands, or hung with costly drapery; the bells of the neighboring churches were sending forth a joyous peal, while drums and trumpets resounded from every quarter. An immense multitude, both in carriage and on foot, thronged every avenue. The Baroness commanded her coachman to drive up one side, as a deafening shout rent the air, intimating the monarch's approach. Another shout—and another ascended from the people; all eyes were turned to one individual. Mounted on a milk-white charger, his head uncovered, and repeatedly bowing to the multitude, sat—Charles II! The Baroness's attention was suddenly called to her young friend. She, too, had looked that way; but the sight had been too much for her—Annette de Montmorency had fainted. She had seen that face before; it was the stranger Knight—it was Charles Stuart!



THE LADY'S WORLD OF FASHION. 1842.